



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF RELIGION.

CAN anything new be said on such a well-worn subject as the nature of religion? If I did not think that there could, I should not attempt it. My point of view may not be new, but I have not met with it. I shall not begin in the usual way by enumerating the various theories of religion, but shall proceed at once to set forth my particular theory.

My thesis is that *religion is a substitute in the rational world for instinct in the subrational world.* But when I say *religion*, I mean, as my title implies, the essential element of religion, which is a very different thing from what is popularly understood by religion. For, while all that is embraced in existing religions of both civilized and uncivilized races is doubtless legitimate and belongs to religion in the sense of having been produced by it, the greater part of it has been superadded to the original nucleus, and this to such an extent that the latter has been lost from view. This process of enveloping the kernel of the religious idea takes place so early that it is difficult to find it even in the most rudimentary religions. Nevertheless it has always been present and active, and to those who understand its nature its workings can be seen at all stages. It is, in fact, intuitively perceived by all, as is evidenced by the almost universal recognition that religion is something good, and this in the face of all the evil that has been done in its name.

The task of unmasking religion is not an easy one. The external garb it wears has come to belong to it. It is organically connected with the primitive form, secreted, as it were, from its tissues, like the shell of a mollusk or the carapace of a tortoise. The alteration that has taken place in religion is not properly a development. It may be compared to the modification that certain plants have undergone at the hands of man. It has been artificially transformed and made to depart from the original type. It always bears the marks of some kind of reasoning, however erroneous.

Although religion is mainly a product of reason, it would be impossible to elucidate its real nature without going much farther back in the history of mind than the origin of the rational faculty, even after conceding all the claims that have been made for the antiquity of that faculty. It may be true, as is asserted of both life and mind, that no point can be indicated at which reason actually began, yet we must recognize that there was a time when it was not. For all the purposes to be subserved in the present discussion it may be said to have begun with man, leaving the question open as to when man himself began. For whatever earlier and feebler states of the rational faculty may have existed, it was only in man that it was sufficiently marked to make religion possible. *Per contra*, no type of human creature has thus far been discovered in which that faculty was not strong enough to generate the religious sentiment.

Anything so universal must surely have a cause in the nature of things. This cause is, of course, psychic, and before it can be understood it is necessary to consider still simpler phenomena. It would be hopeless to attempt an explanation of the rational faculty until the psychic faculty itself was first explained. The reason is a late derivative product, and no clear grasp of its nature can be gained until the nature of mind is first understood. I do not profess to have any unknown secret as to the nature of mind. The biological origin of mind I shall assume to be established, and the principle underlying it need be only briefly set forth. The primordial element of mind is not reason, but *feeling*. A sense of the agreeable and the disagreeable, however feeble, must be assumed as the primary condition to the preservation of the class of organisms in which this sense inheres. This incipient *algedonism* lies at the very foundation of the entire series of psychic phenomena. It is the basis of psychology.

Living things differ from non-living in requiring some means of preservation. They are made up of delicate, colloidal, unstable constituents which are easily destroyed. The organic compounds consist not only of elements of the most complex inorganic compounds, but also of elements of other

organic compounds of lower orders, in a rising scale of complexity. Organized bodies are formed out of the highest and most unstable of these latter, such as protein, albumen, and hemoglobin, making substances so complex that their chemical formulas cannot be written. Protoplasm is the primordial organized substance,—the “physical basis of life,”—but it is as much more isomeric and unstable as it is more complex than any of its organic constituents, so that there may be hundreds of different kinds of protoplasm, varying according to a sort of permutation of their organic elements. The very essence of the life principle results from the fact that, in consequence of the relatively immense size of the molecules of protoplasm, due to this recompounding of the already highly complex molecules of organic compounds, the molecular activities of the units are converted into molar activities of the product. This is the only rational explanation I can frame of the phenomena of spontaneous movement, or motility.* Structures, therefore, thus composed, however simple biologically, are exceedingly complex chemically, and this complexity is accompanied by an instability so great that every particle of organized matter is constantly undergoing change by the process called *metabolism*, which is nothing less than the continual falling back of its molecules from the high-tension plane required to constitute life to some lower chemical plane, and the equally unceasing supply of these “waste” elements by a reproductive power inherent in the living mass.

When we consider, therefore, the extreme perishability of organized beings, it is easy to see that for life to exist every possible means must be employed for their protection. The advanced biology of to-day makes it no longer necessary to call in intelligent design to explain these means. In fact, at the same time that the nature of living substance was being revealed by science there was being discovered the natural principle that makes it possible. That principle is natural selection, and we now know that, in conformity with

* I first proposed this theory in 1882. See the *American Naturalist*, Vol. XVI., December, 1882, p. 978.

that principle, only such organic beings have persisted as have been furnished with some adequate means of self-preservation. There are many such means. Plants possess protective structures of various kinds, and not generally having the power of spontaneous locomotion, which so greatly increases the dangers of most animal forms, they are able to exist without true sensibility to pain. Having for their function to absorb inorganic matter, chiefly in the gaseous or liquid form, they do not require the spur of appetite to impel the pursuit of nourishment. Animals, too, possess numerous other means of protection, such as shells and bony coverings, in addition to sensitiveness. Great fertility performs the same office by constantly filling the places of those that succumb. But in the case of plastic organisms endowed with the power of spontaneous locomotion and compelled to subsist on organic matter, there can be no question that the great and paramount mode of self-preservation is the one pointed out,—viz., susceptibility to pleasure and pain.

This twofold or algedonic character was necessary, for it was not enough merely to escape the destructive agencies of an impinging and more or less hostile environment. There was an internal destructive agent far more fatal than the external ones,—viz., the very waste of tissue above described as incident to the nature itself of living substance. Metabolism could not go on unless every molecule that fell back to a lower, non-living plane was replaced by another raised to the plane of life by the nutritive powers of the organism. It was not alone necessary to avoid dangers; it was equally necessary to seek supplies. But these expressions, closely examined, are seen in each case to involve an ellipsis. They illustrate the tendency to speak of feeling in terms of function. As a matter of fact, it is not danger that is avoided nor nourishment that is sought. The thing shunned is pain, and the thing pursued is pleasure. Safety and nutrition are the indirect or consequential results. The organism knows nothing of these. They are secured by a sort of adjustment of circumstances, a contract, as it were, between Nature and Life. It may also be looked at as a kind of "pre-established har-

mony" between things wholly dissimilar, by which the one shall always coincide with the other. It is analogous to the harmony between the hands of a watch turned by different wheels at different rates but perfectly adjusted, or to the action of the "cut-off" adjusted to that of the piston in a steam-engine. In short, the principle is that of *adaptation*, which may be conceived in a neuter as well as in an active sense. The adaptations of man are active and *telic*, those of nature are self-adjusting and *genetic*, but the result is the same; and the mechanisms evolved by nature so closely resemble those designed by man that it is only in late years, and now only by special students of nature, that the distinction pointed out has been perceived.

For present purposes even this distinction is immaterial, and if any prefer to regard this great primary bio-psychic adaptation as the work of design, this will not affect the conclusions to be reached. It is only necessary clearly to grasp the truth that, on the one hand, the class of beings under consideration came into possession of a faculty unknown to all other objects, which led them to distinguish the agreeable from the disagreeable and to seek the one and shun the other, and that, on the other hand, those things or acts which possessed the quality of agreeableness were in the main such as supplied the needs of existence, while those which were disagreeable were such as endangered existence. This primordial adaptation, when compared with the multitudinous adaptations familiar in every department of organic life, is found not to differ from these in its essential character. The principle of all organic adaptation is one. That principle is natural selection, and it began to act at the earliest beginnings of life. It may be looked upon as a process of trial and error,—*i.e.*, of trying every conceivable device for rendering vital existence possible and for making it safer and fuller, and the selection of such, and such only, as secured these results. Such experiments usually take the form of structural modifications; but the essential thing is advantageousness, and if this is secured by immaterial qualities these are as legitimate subjects for selection as physical organs. At bottom it comes to the same

thing, since every psychic attribute is the result of some modification in the nerve tissues. In the case under consideration the device belonged to this latter class, resulting in an immaterial quality which may be called *feeling*, restricting the term to the intensive form already described, and excluding the indifferent form which later played so great a rôle as the basis of the perceptive faculty.* The object may be said to have been to *induce* the creature to perform the acts that would preserve its existence, and no other device is conceivable than the one that was actually adopted. Had no such quality been possible in nature, we seem compelled to assume that animal life would never have been developed.

An adaptation implies two terms. In the present case one of these terms was the action of the organism, while the other was its preservation. Activity may be looked upon as the means and existence as the end. Every device possesses this nature. A telic device, or invention, is the adoption of a means for the attainment of an end foreseen by the designer, and there need be no resemblance between the means and the end. It is the same with genetic devices, if such an expression is admissible. An organ is not at all like its product, any more than is a machine. The product of a machine or mechanism is the foreseen end or purpose. In genetic mechanisms the end is not foreseen, but from the poverty of language to designate genetic products we are compelled to speak of them as the purposes or objects of the mechanisms.

There is, however, a word in biological language which avoids the implication of design. That word is *function*, and the end or purpose of an organ is the function it performs. In the case under consideration, therefore, feeling, which is the means, has for its function the preservation of life. The antithesis, therefore, is constantly between feeling and function.†

* Cf. "The Psychic Factors of Civilization." Boston, 1893, pp. 16, 21, 39.

† I have been making use of this antithesis regularly in all my works and writings and insisting upon its fundamental nature, and it was not till quite recently that I learned that the principle was not generally understood by non-biological readers. It has always seemed so clear and simple to me that I have never before gone into a logical analysis of it, for fear of being unnecessarily ele-

While function, in this sense of anything that tends to preserve, continue, or better existence, is thus clearly the end for which feeling was developed, this is true only from the highly general standpoint of the world at large. It is not true from the standpoint of the creature. The end of the creature is feeling itself. Just here is the origin of the great bio-psychic dualism that is indissolubly connected with the entire sentient world. It is as manifest in the highest types of human beings as it is in the amoeba. It is the most fundamental antinomy in the world of living things.

The adaptation between feeling and function is so nearly complete that the absolute dissimilarity of the two terms has been universally overlooked. The assumption on the part of biologists of a natural or necessary relation between them is naïve. It is to be classed along with the dictum of "common sense" as to the knowledge the mind possesses of the external world, the supposed identity of mental conceptions with things conceived, of noumena with phenomena. It was this popular misconception, observed by me from the outset, that led me to liken the adaptation of feeling to function to the "pre-established harmony" of Leibnitz.* At the beginning the adaptation must have been virtually perfect, and throughout the lower forms of life it is very complete. Just as the origin

mentary. But I observed that even so clear a thinker as Professor John Dewey stumbled over it (*Psychological Review*, Vol. I., No. 4, July, 1894, p. 403), and the sociologist who has best understood and most appreciated my contributions to that science, Dr. Albion W. Small, in a private letter from which he kindly allows me to quote, said, "I have felt all along that you have had connotations in mind which, when explained, would put a different look on your propositions about 'feeling and function,' but I am quite sure you have not expressed them so that we can do justice to your idea. My impression is that you have taken for granted some familiarity with certain technical concepts in biology, and that terms which carry a commonplace meaning with you somehow lose important parts of their content among people not acquainted with that biological usage." In view of all this I feel that I need not apologize for setting forth all the steps in the logical process by which I somewhat intuitively reached this principle seventeen years ago (see *Science*, original series, Vol. I., New York, October 23, 1880, p. 210).

* "Dynamic Sociology." New York, 1883, Vol. I., pp. 469, 602; Vol. II., p. 121.

itself of sentient life depended upon the closeness of the adaptation, so the continuance and development of this type of life has constantly required the maintenance of this harmony. It is not generally perceived that there is a strong tendency to depart from it. The organism itself has no inherent reason for maintaining it. Its end being feeling, it has no motive to pursue other ends. If, in a changing environment, it is impelled to perform acts that are opposed to its safety or that of its race, it will perform them in harmony with the inexorable law of its nature. The penalty for such acts is extinction, and this has, in fact, been the fate of millions of beings. The organic world has developed under a law which may be called *the elimination of the wayward*.

But nature is full of resources. As structures developed feeling was intensified, and the increase of feeling was attended with increased waywardness and violation of cosmic law. Immediate impulses could no longer be trusted. With higher organization the conditions of existence grew more delicate and precarious. The simple pursuit of food and safety was no longer sufficient. Provision must be made for a longer period of helplessness in the young, and also for future supplies against climatal changes. A curb must be put to the now fully developed *will*. The next great step, necessary to secure these ends, was the origin of *instinct*. Instinct may be looked upon as a device of nature to make the organism desire to perform acts that subserve function, but which would not otherwise be desired. It consists in a readjustment of the nerve plexuses so that acts shall become pleasurable which do not directly satisfy an immediate want. Without these nervous readjustments which lead the creature to act in ways which, from its own standpoint would be illogical, but which in fact make for preservation, it would perpetually pursue pleasures that lead to destruction. But instincts, too, were developed under the law of advantage, or the survival of the fittest, and the obdurate types that refused to adopt them were crowded out of existence.

There is less difference than is generally supposed between simple functions and instincts. Both came into existence in

the same way, only the latter represent a higher and more complicated condition. This truth has been clearly expressed by M. Letourneau. He says:

“Chez les animaux, même chez les animaux supérieurs et chez le premier d’entre eux, l’homme, il existe quantité de coordinations de mouvements, si profondément inscrites dans les centres nerveux, qu’elles sont en même temps inconscientes et indispensables au maintien de la vie; ce ne sont pas des instincts, ce sont des fonctions. Quand la série des actes, enregistrée dans les centres nerveux, se rapport au genre d’existence de l’animal, lui dicte qu’il en ait ou non conscience, une certaine conduite dans la vie, il en résulte ce que nous appelons des instincts. Mais, au fond, la raison biologique des fonctions et des instincts est la même.” *

Life is a frail and delicate thing, and in the course of its history it has passed through several ordeals. The first of these was when plastic organisms were created, endowed with locomotion, and dependent for subsistence on organic matter, the condition to the existence of which was feeling, as above described. This was the origin of mind. The second ordeal was when the will † had so strongly asserted itself that existence was put in jeopardy. This was remedied by the development of instincts. Passing over minor ones, we come at last to an ordeal still more severe than any of the previous ones. In the natural upward march of the psychic faculty feeling became at length so potent and its demands so imperative that the direct efforts hitherto employed in its satisfaction no longer sufficed, and a new device was gradually elaborated that should secure the ends of the creature with far greater success. This was the “indirect method of conation,” ‡ and to the affective faculty was now added the perceptive faculty. The intellect was developed as an aid to the will. §

There is a close analogy, or something much more than an analogy, between the action of the intellectual faculty and that of instinct. Although the method is very different, the

* “L’Evolution de la Morale,” 2e éd., Paris, 1894, p. 34.

† See “Psychic Factors of Civilization,” Chapters viii.-xiv.

‡ “Dynamic Sociology,” Vol. II., p. 99.

§ “Psychic Factors,” Part II.

purpose is the same, and the general result accomplished by the two faculties is identical,—viz., increased efficiency in securing the satisfaction of desire. We saw that instinct had the effect of making the creature desire to act in ways in which it would not otherwise have acted,—i.e., to act illogically, viewed from the strictly individual standpoint. Now, every indirect action is also, from the same point of view, an illogical action.* Intellect, too, like instinct, changes the direction of desire. It leads the agent to desire the means instead of the end, otherwise, under the laws of the mechanics of mind, there could be no action.†

But this immense gain, from the standpoint of the individual, almost immediately commenced to threaten the destruction of the race of beings to which this faculty had been committed. It was now so easy to secure the satisfaction of desire, and desires had grown so manifold and so vehement, a larger and larger proportion of them not being adapted to function, many, indeed, being directly opposed to it, that obviously, if, under this new dispensation, everything were allowed to go on without restraint, the race of rational beings must quickly run its course and come to naught. Fortunately, this very perceptive faculty, which was being so freely employed in the interest of feeling regardless of function, was also capable of dimly and intuitively *perceiving* the dangers to which it was leading. Along with the individual mind working thus egoistically for the individual's end, keenly pointing out the ways in which pain could be thwarted and pleasure assured, there was also working, broadly, deeply, and subconsciously, what may be properly called a collective or social mind, solemnly warning against the danger, and authoritatively inhibiting all race-destroying actions. A new device, analogous in many respects to instinct on the lower plane, was gradually developed and perfected *pari passu* with the reason on the higher plane. This device was *religion*.

* See "Dynamic Sociology," Vol. II., p. 380.

† I have fully explained this principle in a previous article. See *The Monist*, Vol. V., Chicago, January, 1895, pp. 255, 256.

Religion is, therefore, as my thesis asserts, the substitute among rational beings for instinct among irrational beings. Just as the intellect was developed for the purpose of enabling feeling beings to satisfy by indirect methods desires which they could not satisfy by direct methods, so religion came forward as a more powerful curb to the excesses into which this new egoistic agent would have otherwise plunged its unguided possessors, and for which instinct would have proved wholly inadequate.

It is customary to regard instinct as a substitute for reason, but in so far as there is truth in this view it is in an entirely different sense from that in which the terms are here employed. It is possible that the modifications of nerve structure which result in preservative instincts may receive their initial impulse from a dim consciousness of the necessity for the acts which the instincts impel, so that instincts may be said to rest primarily upon a form of awareness that cannot be generically distinguished from incipient reason. It is also true that many of the acts that are dictated by instinct are the same that would have been dictated by a fully developed reason, had such existed, so that instincts seem to embody a sort of collective wisdom which the individual creatures do not possess. But neither of these assumptions is required by a full comprehension of the law of natural selection, and acts apparently the most intelligent may be accounted for under that law on the part of creatures wholly devoid of intelligence. It is therefore perfectly scientific to look upon instincts as the exclusive products of genetic forces. It is certain from their eminently conservative character that they constitute the necessary curb to the rapidly growing passions of psychically evolving creatures which without them would have inevitably whelmed them in destruction, and which, in obedience to the universal biologic law of the elimination of the wayward, actually did doom to extinction a far greater number than instinct had the power to save.

After the appearance of reason upon the scene, passion not certainly having diminished, but having continued to increase, the new power of gratifying passion only served to multiply

the dangers that beset the triumphant legatees of this rich heritage. The very method by which intellect works, far too rapid to give time for the development of instincts, precluded for all future time the employment of this safeguard. A new safeguard must be found commensurate with the forces to be held in check, otherwise the fate of the majority of its predecessors must await the dominant race. Religion, in the primitive and fundamental sense in which the term is here employed, was such a safeguard.

What, then, is religion? If we assume, as I shall do, that it is natural and not supernatural,—*i.e.*, that it grew out of the nature of man, and was not given to him from without, it seems altogether probable that it was mainly a product of reason. It arose simultaneously with the rational faculty, but, as that faculty without some check was essentially destructive, this would have been the case even if reason had had no part in the development of religion; if, for example, religion, like instinct, had been wholly due to natural selection. It is not necessary to discuss this point, but personally I am disposed to ascribe it to the joint action of natural selection and reason. These two influences are inversely proportional. The very feeblest forms of reason, while they might cause wide departures from the path of safe activity, could scarcely work out a plan of salvation. At this stage, when the human organism was mainly animal, the survival of the fittest might ultimately result in the development of structural tendencies to the inhibition of destructive actions. Such tendencies would embody the germs of the religious sentiment. They might be called *religious instincts*, but they would differ from normal instincts in merely restraining unsafe activities instead of producing safe ones. In fact, this is the essential characteristic of religion as distinguished from instinct, that it is negative or restrictive, while instinct is positive and constructive.

If the beginnings of religion were genetic, unconscious, and non-rational, this must have constituted a brief and almost hypothetical stage. With the developing faculty which made the satisfaction of desire so easy, there must have also grown

up an increasing sense of the danger of such unbridled satisfaction. The evil effects of excesses could not have escaped observation. As one after another fell a prey to passion and dropped out of the group, a feeling of the necessity of preventing this grew with the strengthening reason and ultimately took form. This sense, although it must have inhered in the individual mind, was essentially a group sense, and the action in which it resulted was group action. The deep-felt necessity of saving the race inspired the invention and adoption of means to that end. The religious sentiment must be distinguished from its products. The sense of race safety is its very kernel. The primary purpose of religion was at the beginning and always has remained *salvation*. It simply says to the wayward self-seeker, "Thou shalt not," and all the Decalogues have this negative form. But it must enforce its decrees. Even a sense of the penalty for race-destroying acts was powerless to prevent their performance. Some kind of organized system, coercive in its nature, was necessary. The group mind of every race has proved capable of devising such a system. Such are the various religious systems of the world. Whence have they derived their sanction?

There is one fact which all races and peoples, however primitive, and all mankind, however enlightened, have universally recognized. This fact is that there is a power outside themselves which is beyond their control. Rude peoples, living as they always do, in direct contact with nature, are constantly brought into relations with this power and made to feel much more strongly than do civilized races their complete subjection to it. It is this sense of helplessness before the majesty of the environment which, if it is not religion itself, is the foundation upon which all religion is built. It is the *point d'appui* of the group sentiment of safety, that upon which the group reason lays hold to restrain the dangerous activities of the individual reason. Teachers of religion have, I believe, a faint perception of this truth, and at long intervals a more or less definite expression of it may be detected in their utterances, usually, however, so muffled in the blanket of doctrinal language as to be scarcely heard. The following passage is the clearest that has yet come to my notice :

"If you analyze religion—not my religion, but religion itself—you will find that the essential idea which is its very soul, inheres in the relation which exists between man and the infinite power manifested in the universe above him, no matter what your theory of the universe may be. . . . If you study the lowest type of religion that we are able to discover anywhere on the face of the earth, you will find that the people of that time were thinking of themselves and of some mysterious power not themselves,—some power that held their lives, their destiny, their happiness in its hands; and the object of their religion consisted in getting into right relations with this power. And this getting into right relations with the god has been the one object and aim of religion in every age of the world, and no change of thought can possibly outgrow it. So long as men love, think, and feel, have fears and hopes, so long as the universe stands and is the manifestation as now of this inscrutable power, so long man must be conscious that his life, his health, his sanity, his prosperity, his all, depends upon knowing something about this power, and getting, so far as possible, into right relations with it. Paul may talk about being reconciled to God, and Herbert Spencer may talk about being adjusted to our environment, both are seeking after one and the same thing, which is the knowledge of this power and right relations to it."*

Philosophers, too, have occasionally, though rarely, caught a glimpse of this truth, and of such adumbrations I will give one of the least shadowy :

"D'une part, toutes nos inclinations se rallient sous la seule affection qui puisse les discipliner: d'une autre part, toutes nos conceptions se coordonnent d'après un spectacle indépendant de nous. En même temps, cette économie extérieure devient la base directe de notre conduite, toujours destinée à la subir dignement ou à la modifier sagement. L'être se trouve ainsi lié, en dedans et au dehors, par l'entière convergence de ses sentiments et de ses pensées vers la puissance supérieure qui détermine ses actes. Alors il y a vraiment *religion*, c'est à dire unité complète, tous les moteurs internes étant coordonnés entre eux, et leur ensemble librement soumis à la fatalité extérieure. . . . Telle est l'issue finale du grand dualisme positif entre l'organisme et le milieu, ou plutôt entre l'homme et le monde, ou, mieux encore, entre l'humanité et la terre."†

It must be remembered that with primitive man the unknown was vast. He was absolutely ignorant of the stupendous forces of nature playing about him. It is no part of my purpose to trace the growth of religions out of religion. This has been tried many times, but the history has never seemed

* From a sermon preached by the Rev. Minot J. Savage, D.D., on the 3d of December, 1893, at Washington, D. C., which has not been published. It was reported in full by Mr. Victor Louis Mason, who has kindly shown me his notes, from which I make the above extract.

† Auguste Comte, "Politique Positive," Vol. II., p. 18.

to me to go back to religion itself. Dr. Edward B. Tylor, than whom no one has more ably treated this class of subjects, has reviewed all known primitive religions, and he arrived at what he aptly styled the "minimum definition" of religion,—viz., "belief in spiritual beings" * Doubtless from the standpoint of the ethnographer this definition is the simplest that could be formulated. It satisfies all the requirements of a natural history of man; but from the standpoint of general or cosmical philosophy it falls far short of a principle that can explain the phenomena of religion. Belief in spiritual beings is not religion itself, but a consequence of religion. It grew out of the fact upon which I have insisted, that the race was in danger from unknown and uncontrollable agencies, and the same faculty that perceived this also sought to explain it. Spirits, ghosts, fetishes, gods,—these were only explanations, deductions, conclusions, products of the dread of the unknown. *Primos in orbe deos fecit timor.* Mythology is philosophy. Theology and science start from the same stake.

It remains to point out how religion took the place of instinct on this higher rational plane, and served effectually to check the evils that reason had so greatly multiplied. Although the *sense of dependence* above described is that which made religious systems possible, it could no more manifest its saving virtues without an organ than a sensory system can act without a motor system. Every human thought, in order to accomplish any purpose, must develop a mechanism through which it can work. Every human institution is the product of a thought. The thought went before and produced the institution. The institution is the mechanical embodiment of the thought. It was so with religious institutions. The religious idea, as I have endeavored to sketch it, worked on the group, on society (for association was taking place at the same time), and in the normal way developed the appropriate organ for its expression, the necessary mechanism for its realization. Religion as an institution is a different thing from religion as an idea. The institution arose like all

* "Primitive Culture." London, 1871, Vol. I., p. 383.

other human institutions, as a product of the social forces brought into equilibrium for the storage and economical expenditure of social energy.* As such it was effective in accomplishing its purpose,—*i.e.*, in performing its function.

In the great dualism of life, religion is the champion of function against feeling, of the race against the individual. It is race reason working for function against individual reason working for feeling. It represents the primordial conservatism of mankind. There has never been a time when the desires of men did not impel them to perform acts destructive to the race. The mandate of individual reason is to obtain satisfaction. Interest is its only guide, the interest of the individual. Now, it constantly happens that acts which are in the interest of the individual are against that of the race. A man may pursue egoistic ends successfully during life by acts that do not react upon himself or tend to do so, and yet his whole course may be inimical to society at large. Most self-seeking is of this nature. The fine maxims to the contrary, and the stories in the Sunday-school books, are merely myths invented by religion to deter from self-seeking. So long as any continue to believe them they have this effect by inspiring fear of consequences or hope of reward for good deeds. But the truly wise no longer believe that "the way of transgressors is hard," or that "the righteous are never forsaken." The same book that teaches these things also teaches that "he that seeketh findeth," and the persistent seeker after his personal advantage usually succeeds in finding it. Says John Stuart Mill:

"The very idea of distributive justice, or of any proportionality between success and merit, or between success and exertion, is in the present state of society so manifestly chimerical as to be relegated to the regions of romance. . . . If persons are helped in their worldly career by their virtues, so are they, and perhaps quite as often, by their vices: by servility and sycophancy, by hard-hearted and close-fisted selfishness, by the permitted lies and tricks of trade, by gambling speculations, not seldom by downright knavery." †

* I have developed this principle in an article entitled "The Mechanics of Society." See the *American Journal of Sociology* for September, 1896, Vol. II., No. 2, pp. 234-254.

† *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. XXXI. (New Series, Vol. XXV.), 1879, p. 226.

Not that there are not vices which react upon the individual and ruin him, but these are the results of irrational impulses. The class of actions here under consideration is that of rational calculation aimed at self-satisfaction. Such actions are opposed to the safety of society because the gain to self is chiefly at the expense of others, and the number injured is far greater than the number benefited. The algebraic sum is a loss of social efficiency and a menace to the race. All forms of exploitation of the many by the few come under this head. The evil is twofold. It affects the existing group and it affects the future. It need not at all affect the individual either at the time or at any other time. Such also are all destructive actions that waste the accumulations of time and labor.

Another important class, and the one that religion earliest grappled with and still contends against, results from the powerful reproductive passion. It was possible for primitive peoples to pursue this form of satisfaction egoistically, to lead unregulated, promiscuous lives, with no concern for the functional consequences, and the result would be that while no evils might attend the individuals so acting, while the male sex at least might have considerable to gain and little to lose, the offspring would be neglected and would perish and the race would be, if not destroyed, at least so reduced in strength as to become a prey to other races that had learned to regulate this class of conduct. Religion has been the chief agent in the organization of marriage systems and in establishing the family relation upon which society so largely rests.

But it is needless to multiply examples. Suffice it to say that the mission of religion was to restrain the will. It represented the race and the future; it denied the claims of feeling; it demanded sacrifice. It may be called the *social instinct*. But there are two things commonly claimed for it that form no part of its purpose. These are *altruism* and *progress*. Although the natural enemy of egoism because race-destructive, and although perpetually enjoining group action and social action, religion in its essence has nothing to do with sympathy, or any other kind of 'pathy. It deals with func-

tion, not feeling, and simply serves Dame Nature in her great cosmic scheme of preserving, perpetuating, and increasing life. If to these can be added the perfectionment of living beings, this is only because such perfectionment is a means to the supreme end. It has no reference to the deepening or heightening of the quality of sentiment. Anything in existing religions that seems to contradict this statement is something superadded to religion itself—some late graft upon the original stock—and belongs to a modern period.

As regards progress, the case is still clearer, and here we encounter a singular paradox. Religion may be regarded as the guardian of order, but not for the purpose of securing progress. The progress of the world has consisted entirely in the degree to which the claims of feeling have commanded recognition. What is meant by progress when speaking of man is never the mere increase in the number of human beings. The attempt thus to define it was Mr. Kidd's fatal mistake.* In so far as it ever refers to the perfection of the human type progress has in view man's capacity to enjoy. Social progress consists in the better realization of the power to satisfy want. *Æsthetic* progress is the increase and refinement of tastes and the increased opportunity to gratify them. All forms of progress are so many victories of the will over nature, of feeling over function. It is in the nature of religion to resist these tendencies. They are centrifugal, and therefore dangerous. Religion is the force of social gravitation that holds the social world in its orbit. The primary analogy is this cosmic one which likens religion to the gravitant and reason to the radiant forces of the universe. Upon this I need not dwell. But there is a biologic analogy which comes much nearer home, and which it is important to note. This likens religion to heredity and reason to variation in the organic world. The former preserves the type while the latter modifies it; the one tends to fix the species, the other to transform it. Biologists are now familiar with this great antithesis which inheres in the entire history of

* "Social Evolution," by Benjamin Kidd. London and New York, 1894.

life. Even Goethe gave expression to it, and in the following form :

“ Die Idee der Metamorphose ist gleich der *vis centrifuga* und würde sich ins Unendliche verlieren, wäre ihr nicht ein Gegengewicht zugeben : ich meine den Specificationstrieb, das zähe Beharrlichkeitsvermögen dessen, was einmal zur Wirklichkeit gekommen, eine *vis centripeta*, welcher in ihrem tiefsten Grunde keine Aeusserlichkeit etwas anhaben kann.”*

Von Baer arrived at the same truth independently, and the transformist school of biologists have shown that adaptation and modification are the products of the law of variation held in check by the power of heredity. Human progress has followed a precisely similar course, and has been the product of the law of reason held in check by the power of religion. When, therefore, we say that religion is non-progressive, we mean nothing more than when we say that heredity is non-progressive. But for the law of variation there would certainly be no organic development, and if religion worked alone there could be no human progress. But, on the other hand, it could be said that without the hereditary check the organic world would be whirled out of existence by the unrestrained tendency to vary, and, similarly, without the religious check the human race would have been borne to destruction by the extravagant vagaries of the unbridled reason. It is not progress that either heredity or religion opposes, but change, and progress in both the organic and social realms is a compromise between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Cosmic, organic, and superorganic evolution takes place according to one principle,—the principle of organization, which consists in the natural storage and economic expenditure of energy through progressively higher products of these harmoniously interacting antagonistic forces.†

Another point of view from which this fundamental an-

* Goethe, “Metamorphose der Thiere.”

† I have worked out these principles in several articles. See, especially, “Cosmic and Organic Evolution,” *Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. XI., October, 1877, pp. 672–682; “The Natural Storage of Energy,” *The Monist*, Vol. V., January, 1895, pp. 247–263; “The Mechanics of Society,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. II., September, 1896, pp. 234–254.

tithesis may be contemplated is that of economics. That science deals exclusively with *utility*. Religion may be said to be diametrically opposed to it in that it deals exclusively with *necessity*.^{*} This explains its superior sanction. The primary requisite is to live. If existence is lost all is lost. It is useless to discuss degrees of enjoyment until life is first secure. As a matter of fact, man has been thus far chiefly engaged in a struggle for existence. It is only in the later stages of social development, and among the most favored classes of society, that there has been any energy left to expend in efforts to be happy. The mass is everywhere exhausting all its energies in the effort to live. This is largely due to social and moral restraints, to exploitation by the egoistic reason of the specially endowed or favorably circumstanced. Formerly it was chiefly oppression,—*i.e.*, the exploitation of the governing class. The priesthoods that have embodied the germ of religion have contributed their share, and the essential conservatism of religion has usually allied it with the "powers that be." Man's struggles for liberty, of which human history is chiefly the record, have consisted simply in so many assertions of the claims of feeling against function, so many demands of utility upon necessity. Human progress has consisted in the reluctant concession of such of these claims and demands as did not threaten existence.

Throughout western Europe and America this struggle is chiefly over. The ruling class is at the feet of the Demos and the power of the priesthood is broken. But a new kind of oppression has taken the place of the old. A new set of rulers has come forward. The owners of the means of subsistence now dictate to the masses. The struggle for existence goes on as before, and, as before, it is the egoistic reason, coupled with the accident of position and backed by the whole body of proprietary law, that is able to exploit the mass not favored by these conditions. The "labor question" of to-day is a new assertion of the claims of feeling

^{*} I use these terms in the sense in which they were defined by me in the *American Journal of Sociology* for March, 1896, Vol. I., p. 627.

against function, a renewed demand of utility upon necessity. It is essentially utilitarian, and economists are just beginning to understand that their science is dynamic, and that "consumption," *i.e.*, enjoyment, *i.e.*, feeling, constitutes its true basis. To all of which religion, from its very nature, is opposed.

Here, however, an important qualification is to be noted. The mind naturally tends to leave out the steps by which it has arrived at results. This tendency was mentioned in the early part of this paper, where it was shown that it is not nourishment that the animal seeks, but pleasure; not death or destruction that it fears or flies from, but pain. Now, just as we habitually speak of feeling in terms of function and neglect the important step that lies between them, so in speaking of religion as opposed to pleasure we employ a similar ellipsis. It is not pleasure that religion opposes, but danger; and pleasure is so often dangerous, especially in the earlier stages of existence,—in the state that Dr. Patten has so expressively denominated a "pain economy,"*—that the two are ultimately confounded. This explains the next point to be considered.

It belongs to the true nature of religion constantly to yield to the demands of reason and of feeling. It is no reproach to it that it has so yielded. Its opposition, as we have seen, is not based on any hostility to pleasure *per se*. It is only as a source of danger that it attacks it. Its mission is not to destroy, but to conserve. It is not pleasure itself that is bad, but the acts it produces. Selfish greed is execrable, but the fruits of honest toil are noble. Promiscuity is hateful, but wedlock is sacred. Just as gravitation must compromise with radiation to produce an orb of space, just as heredity must compromise with variation to develop an organic being, just as function must compromise with feeling to make an animal world possible, just as instinct must compromise with will to secure the highest animal development, so, on the same gen-

* See his "Theory of Social Forces." Supplement to the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* for January, 1896.

eral principle, and in strict continuation of this same grand series of cosmic steps, must religion yield to the demands of reason wherever they are safe before anything worth conserving can be produced by man.

It is true that many of the late derivative products that call themselves religions do combat pleasure *per se*, but, as I have shown, these are artificially distorted forms, and such doctrines are excrescences that have grown out of the normal religious trunk. They are so far removed from the region of healthy circulation that the very ground of the doctrines is lost sight of, and the means that true religion employs are mistaken for its end. All forms of religious austerity, of self-abnegation, asceticism, puritanism, etc., are abnormal growths of this kind, and, like certain anatomical organs that once had a purpose, but are no longer needed, they have become pathologic. This tendency to survival is universal. The persistence of the obsolete is a principle of the organic and superorganic worlds alike. The anchoret hates pleasure for the same reason that the miser loves money.

It follows that the recognition of the claims of reason to the full satisfaction of feeling must be yielded by religion as fast as adequate guaranties are furnished that everything useful thus far created at so great expense shall be conserved; and the most ardent votary of progress ought to admit that without such guaranty it should not be yielded. The question, therefore, naturally arises, Will religion ever cease to furnish a necessary check to the extravagances of reason and of passion? We saw that religion has its sanction in the mystery of the universe, that it is the vastness of the unknown that furnishes it its hold upon mankind. Will that chasm ever be closed? Shall science, brushing aside one after another the cobwebs that obscure the vaults of nature, at last so completely lay bare her secrets that no hidden terrors will remain? Are science and religion, which, as we saw, started together, but which have so widely diverged in their course, destined to converge and ultimately to coalesce? Will science finally swallow up religion, assume its functions, and stand wholly in its stead? We can only answer these questions by noting

the history of science thus far, by considering its long series of conquests and the steady but orderly recoil of religion as the guaranties of safety were one after another placed in its hands. Noting this, and comparing the condition of the vanguard of civilization with that of its dark beginning, it seems impossible to doubt, not that religion is ever to disappear, but that it will ultimately put all confidence in reason and cease to raise its voice against the realization on the part of man of the fullest capabilities of his nature.

Numerous objections may of course be raised by the captious to the general theory above outlined. I shall only attempt to anticipate one of these. Some, I fancy, will say that it is not religion that I am describing, but ethics. I think I can show that this is not the case. No two things have been more hopelessly confused than ethics and religion. By way of clearing up this confusion, it should be stated at the outset that ethics is wholly concerned with feeling,* while, as I have shown in this article, religion is wholly concerned with function. Pleasure and pain furnish the only basis for a moral quality, while religion has nothing to do with pleasure and pain, but is solely devoted to the maintenance of life. It is exclusively a cosmical agent. In so far, then, as moral philosophers have occupied themselves with this latter problem they have been dealing with religion, and whenever religious teachers talk of happiness and misery they are encroaching upon the domain of ethics. Superficial observers may say that religion chiefly deals with happiness and misery—in another world. Two of the great religions of the world do, in fact, deal mainly with this aspect, but they do not thereby refute the above statements. The doctrine of immortality is one of those late grafts upon the primary stock of religion to which reference has been made. Moreover, it is one of the chief concessions that religion has been compelled to make to the demands of reason for the recognition of the claims of feeling, a concession which was found to be altogether safe.

* I have furnished a demonstration of this statement in another paper. See *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS* for July, 1896, Vol. VI., pp. 443, 444.

These demands had become irresistible in the days of Plato, and the creation of a future state in which feeling should be everything was one of the most sweeping of the whole series of compromises between religion and reason. By it religion saved itself from being completely set aside by the rational will of a determined race, while reason accepted it in the face of its unthinkable assumption of a beginning without an end, an eternity exclusively *a parte post*.

It has been argued that Western peoples are proved by this to be less logical than the Orientals, with their philosophically superior doctrines of transmigration and nirvana, but this is probably not the case, and the explanation is to be sought in the greater power of the egoistic will of the Western world, which rudely thrusts aside all subtle points of logic and makes them wholly subordinate to considerations of interest. The doctrine of immortality, like all the other dogmas of modern faiths, has no connection with the essentials of religion, although it was a necessary phase in the history of the vicissitudes that religion has been compelled to pass through.

I will conclude with a personal remark. Much has been said on the subject of a reconciliation of science and religion. I have not been one of the reconcilers; but if the definition of religion which I have here formulated is correct, it embodies a reconciliation far more complete than any that have been hitherto proposed. If it seems to differ from the view of religion that I have formerly expressed, it is because, in common with most others, I have heretofore taken the actual condition of religion as representing its real nature. I am far from saying that there is anything essentially incorrect in this, and it may well be that what I have here called religion ought to go by some other name. If it is not religion, it is without a name. The name is certainly a matter of little moment. If I have described something that has hitherto escaped attention, I am quite willing another shall give it a name. But that I have in the present essay outlined a chapter still to be written in the history of life, of mind, and of man, I shall remain convinced until clearly shown to be in error.

LESTER F. WARD.

WASHINGTON, D. C.